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SUBJECT: MAS MOVES TO SQUASH CAPITAL ISSUE

¶1. (SBU) On August 15, Constituent Assembly members from the ruling party Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) submitted a resolution removing from the agenda of the Constituent Assembly the issue of where Bolivia's capital should be located. Voting in a block with opposition members representing La Paz, the MAS members passed the resolution by simple majority, 134 votes out of 234. Opposition members without ties to La Paz declared the decision illegal, because it did not receive a two-thirds majority of the vote. Supporters of the capital's move to Sucre (in Chuquisaca Department) took to the streets in protest and have declared a 24 hour strike. In the sometimes-violent protests, two reporters were harassed while La Paz Constituent Assembly members hid in government buildings for safety. Opposition politicians are planning a hunger strike.

¶2. (SBU) The MAS's handling of the vote on the capital--pushing through the MAS agenda with no compromise and no two-thirds majority--is raising further concerns about the role of the Constituent Assembly and whether it has any chance of achieving its goals. The head of the main opposition party Podemos's delegation in the Constituent Assembly stated that the MAS is trying to "definitively bury the Assembly" while the chief of the National Revolutionary Movement, a smaller opposition party, warned that the Assembly "is on the brink of hell, on the brink of the abyss."
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